

Obama administration needs to focus on comprehensive reform, border security, not lawsuits

by **Harry Mitchell**

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I'm troubled by recent reports that the Obama administration may file a lawsuit against Arizona to try to overturn our state's new immigration enforcement law, Senate Bill 1070.

I urged President Barack Obama and his administration against doing so because I strongly believe their time, efforts and resources should be focused on securing our border and fixing our broken immigration system. Arizona needs Washington to take action, but a lawsuit is definitely not the kind of action we need.

For decades, illegal immigration has remained an issue and Arizonans are justifiably fed up with inaction. SB 1070 reflects Arizonans' frustration with the federal government's failure to take responsibility. If the new law spurs Washington to act, then it is a good thing, but make no mistake: neither the state law nor a lawsuit to overturn it will solve the problem, secure our border or fix a broken immigration system.

Neither will disparaging calls to boycott Arizona, which are not only shortsighted, but detrimental to our economy.

I'm frustrated at how partisan gridlock continues to delay action on this critical issue. Illegal immigration didn't occur overnight, and the situation cannot wait simply because folks in Washington choose to play politics. Illegal immigration affects our state more than any other - more than half the illegal U.S.-Mexican border crossings happen in Arizona.

Since coming to Congress in 2007, I have been working to help secure our borders and improve federal enforcement, without which immigration reform will never work. I have supported funding for thousands of additional Border Patrol agents and resources for Immigration and Customs Enforcement. I've repeatedly urged both Presidents George W. Bush and Obama for more National Guard troops on the border, and offered legislation to require it, including a bill with Rep. Dana Rohrabacher, R-Calif., to immediately deploy a minimum of 3,000 additional National Guard troops to the border.

Additionally, to combat the epidemic of drophouses in the Valley, which are often operated by dangerous Mexican drug cartels as gateway stations for drug and human-smuggling operations, I have commissioned a Government Accountability Office investigation into ICE's efforts. The results of this 2 1/2 year investigation are expected later this month.

While I share in the frustration - and support giving local law enforcement the tools they need to work with federal authorities to enforce immigration laws - the state must now demonstrate that SB 1070 can be fairly and effectively implemented. We should take seriously the concerns expressed by local mayors as well as school officials, county prosecutors and police chiefs that local communities will be unduly burdened by unfunded mandates.

Both political parties are guilty of posturing on this issue. Yet, an unsecure border and broken immigration system remain. I remain committed to pushing the president and Congress to take constructive action while working on a more comprehensive, permanent fix. In the meantime, it's incumbent upon state and local officials to ensure that SB 1070 is not misused in the name of a goal that we all share.

Harry Mitchell is a United States congressman representing Arizona's 5th Congressional District, which includes Scottsdale, Tempe, Fountain Hills, Ahwatukee Foothills, Mesa, Chandler, Rio Verde, the Fort McDowell Yavapai Nation and the Salt River Reservation.